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Aen Ghele

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The following is based on *The Witcher Thursdays* and may contradict Andrzej Sapkowski's works or R. Talsorian Games' official *The Witcher Role-Playing Game* line.

Aen Ghele (Elder Speech: *People of the Glaciers* or *Glacier Folk*) are the elves who followed the first Winter Queen into the frozen wastes beyond the Far North.

Once upon a time, the Winter Queen journeyed across the North in her sleigh, scattering shards of ice. These shards compelled any elf struck by them to follow her to her ice palace, where their warmth would soothe her in her solitude. Those who entered the palace joined the ranks of the Glacier Folk—a long-eared tribe dwelling in the realm of the northern lights, far beyond the peaks of the Dragon Mountains and the frozen tundra.

Barbarians from the northern wastes, who swear to the truth of tales about the ice people, sing of towers carved into glaciers and mysterious, never-melting ice from which the frost elves forge their armor. Stories claiming these elves craft gifts for children on Midinváerne, however, should be regarded as mere myths.

- Ron the Islander, a lone elder living in

Aen Ghele	
General Information	
Classificatio	Elven culture
Languages	Elder Speech
Locations	Ard Ghel Far North
Physical Characteristics	
Skin Color	Very pale, sometimes slightly bluish or ruddy
Hair Color	Most often blonde (especially platinum), white, or silver; sometimes ginger or black
Eye Color	Shades of blue, violet, black, gray, and silver
Distinctions	Pointed ears Lack of cuspids or laryngeal prominence

Hengfors, The Witcher Thursdays: Aen Ghele

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Characteristics

Physical features

Elves in general are distinguished by their pointed ears and lack of cuspids[W].[1] Elven males, unlike their human, gnomish and dwarven counterparts, but similarly to other hominids, do not possess laryngeal prominence[W].[2]

Aen Ghele tend to be incredibly pale, sometimes even seemingly bluish. A slightly darker complexion appears among those that spend most of their time outside the chambers of the glacier colonies and become somewhat ruddy due to the sun rays reflected by the snow. People of the Glacier are often blond (especially platinum), white, or silver of hair, albeit ginger and black also appear. Their eyes tend to be in cold shades of blue, violet, black, gray, and silver.

Dozens of generations spent amongst the arctic snows, combined with a touch of icy magic, made the Glacier Folk substantially immune to the dangers of cold, able to survive twice as long in the frost than a typical elf; they are however quicker to get tired under the heat. They are said to be able to almost effortlessly run in snow and on ice.[3]

Mental traits

A significant portion of the Aen Ghele's ancestors were elves posessing the gift of Elder Memory. Aen Ghele tend to remember their lives in much better detail than other races.[3]

History

Followers of the Winter Queen

At one point during the Age of Migration, the Aen Seidhe and the Aen Elle arrived in the world of the Continent,[4] possibly led by by an elven woman named Solryth.[5] According to *Aen Ithlinnespeath*, the prophecy of the farseer Ithlinne, the planet was doomed to perish in the White Frost, a catastrophic event believed by most to represent an incoming ice age. According to the mainstream interpretation of the prophecy, as explained by Avallac'h, the only hope for the elves to survive is to follow the Swallow, destined to open the Ard Gaeth into another reality, where they would wait until the world is reborn with the New Sun.[4]

According to the recollection of events as told by the Aen Ghele millennia after the Age of Migration, the Glacier Folk descend from those elves that followed a different interpretation of *Aen Ithlinnespeath*. White Frost, they say, is to doom only those, that resist it – those, that embrace it instead, are destined to endure the eons of cold to witness the New Sun and welcome their kinsmen returning with the Swallow as stewards of the thawing world.[3]

Ancestors of the Aen Ghele were led to the arctic wastes during the Age of Migration by the first Winter Queen, the Elven Sage who entered the Plane of Ice

and survived.[3] According to a legend, she would pierce her chosen with shards of ice that compelled the struck elves to follow her north where the thaw never sets in.[6]

Throughout millennia, Aen Ghele colonies spotted Ard Ghel, the ice sheet[W] at the top of the world. From time to time, individual elves and whole families disillusioned with the rigor imposed by the royalty and the Aen Saevherne would leave the glacier kingdoms and flee south, forming small tribes amongst the tundra, the taiga, and the drift ice, sporadically establishing contact with Aen Seidhe and human nations. The southernmost areas where the People of the Glaciers at one point lived alongside the People of the Hills were the Dogbane and what would become today's Hengfors League.[3]

King Seighwar's downfall

According to a legend, Seighwar was the son of Páll, the chieftain of one of the tundra tribes, chosen by Aen Saevherne to become the ruler of one of the paramount kingdoms of Ard Ghel. As the custom dictated, Seighwar's marriage was arranged by the Sages, and so he married Aevéna of the Far South, the member the legendary Mist Folk, the Black Seidhe. Despite being distinguished by the Aen Saevherne, Seighwar refused to be their puppet and preferred to listen to the advice of his military and a certain druid-seer he had known from his harsh youth in the tundra.

Said seer promised Seighwar that the future daughter of his daughter Narien was destined to become the new Winter Queen, the true successor to the one that had established the Aen Ghele society ages prior. And so Seighwar shocked his subjects by breaking the tradition and instead of giving Narien to the care of the Aen Saevherne he promised her hand to one of his most trusted generals. The monarch's plans ultimately proved insignificant in face of the Sages' long term plans however.

Narien ended up seduced by Shaerram Dorren, a Sage that arrived in King Seighwar's court under the guise of a traveling harpist. Over the course of a couple months Shaerram managed to court the princess in secret and convince her to abandon the old life and escape with him to the world of Aen Elle. The seer's prophecy was fulfilled in a way – Narien gave birth to Shiadhal, in whom the centuries of the carefully cherished genetic program culminated to recreate the Elder Blood. After taking command of Dearg Ruadhri and marrying Auberon

Muircetach, Shiadhal followed the footsteps of her distant ancestor and proclaimed herself a new Winter Queen – albeit one whose icicles guided the chosen elves not to Ard Ghel but to Tir ná Lia. While she traversed many worlds with the Hunt, the tale has it that Shiadhal was never allowed to visit the ancestral Ard Ghel so that Seighwar was properly punished for disobeying the council of the Sages.[3]

13th century and beyond

Human expansion proved to be the end of the Aen Ghele outposts south of the Dragon Mountains. Their remnants assimilated into local Aen Seidhe societies or lived lone lives amongst the ruins, unaware of the glacier kingdoms of their brethren up north. Glarwyr the Mourner of Chernushko's Ring was probably the last true member of his folk to survive in Hengfors until the second half of the 13th century.[3][7]

Around 1270s, an unconscious Aen Ghele woman was discovered by a Tammerforser trapper in the taiga and transported to the tower of Tadrus Hen Lohsa, Niedamir's court sorcerer, where she was put in a glass tank under a coma.[3][8]

While the majority of the Aen Seidhe elves eventually left the world of the Continent at one point during the 14th or 15th century,[9] it remains unknown whether the Aen Ghele joined them or stayed to welcome the incoming White Frost.

Society

Living conditions

The majority of Aen Ghele elves live in small kingdoms under the Ard Ghel, comprising almost self-sustaining arcologies dug out within the ice and surrounded with smaller settlements in a distance of around a couple dozen miles. Such colonies survive on fruit and vegetables growing in greenhouses heated with magic drawn from underground fire intersections (volcanoes and geisers), cave mushrooms, as well as algae and corals grown in subglacial lakes[W]. The population of these complexes rarely exceeds a couple hundreds as the Aen Ghele are not a particularly fertile race.

Those of Aen Ghele that live outside the Great Glacier are probably the most carnivorous members of the elven species. The ones settled alongside the sea and lakeshores hunt seals, sea lions, penguins, and polar bears atop the drift ice, whereas nomadic tribes roam the tundras and taigas of Far North following the herds of mammoth and reindeer.

Conditions tend to be harsh both in the glacier kingdoms and amongst the tribes. Polar night[W] appears to affect mental health of many, with known cases of elves leaving their communities during the peak of winter never to be seen again. Depression caused by the conditions or perceived lack of existential purpose pushes others to commit suicide.[3]

Social structure

Societies of the Great Glacier are monarchies, each reigned by a King (in Elder Speech: *Rhon*) or a Queen (*Rhena*). They are chosen by the Aen Saevherne, usually from amongst the family members of the previous ruler, albeit sometimes, for reasons they keep to themselves, the Sages choose an aristocrat from another ice kingdom or even an elf from the commonfolk.

Life in these colonies is harsher than the one in Aen Elle or Aen Seidhe cities during their height, and the authority of the monarchs and the Sages appears to be widely respected, as without the Aen Saevherne magic the life within the glacier would be impossible. Rumors are told, however, of people visited by the Sages and asked to "contribute to the future or the elven race", never to be seen again after leaving.

Not all are suited to the life in the heart of the Glacier. In every generation, there are elves that yearn for true warmth, finding themselves unable to endure the harsh rigors and stifling restrictions of the society as chill as the Ard Ghel itself. These Aen Ghele however rarely resort to open rebellion against the authorities, preferring voluntary exile and a life among the Far North's tundras, taigas, and drift ice, sharing knowledge and skills with dh'oine or fighting them over scarce resources. At times, entire families abandon Ard Ghel and give birth to nomadic elven tribes, led by chieftains.[3]

Culture

Clothing and weapons

Members of the nomadic and coastal tribes utilize hide, leather, bones, horns, and tusks from the animals they hunt for their clothing and tools. Both the settled and the nomadic Aen Ghele value kryobelitium, a quasi-metallic material that can be used to forge armor once melted.

In contrast to their bow-loving southern brethren, the Aen Ghele train in the use of various staves, spears, and other pole weapons.[3] Unlike Aen Elle monarchs, whose symbol of power is the *torc'h*,[9] the Winter Queen wore a crown.[10]

Architecture

Settlements in Ard Ghel are primarily carved within the ice or the ground below it, with only slender spires rising above the glacial surface. Constructed from stone, ice, and raw kryobelitium and often built into natural ice formations, these towers serve as portals connecting cities hundreds of miles apart and as observation posts to spot uninvited guests.[3]

Elven and human legends speak of an ice castle or palace belonging to the Winter Queen.[6][3]

The Aen Ghele tribes that migrated south are known to have erected hollowed mounds with underground chambers,[7] not unlike those of the Aen Seidhe in Mirthe[3] or the Mire.[11]

Religion and philosophy

Aen Ghele believe that by embracing the White Frost they are destined to survive the incoming ice age. A fanatical sect within the population sees the White Frost and the Eternal White Flame to be not mere allegories but very real beings, cosmic powers driving the universe. A contrasting view is held by the philosophers of the dualist school, who say that the White Frost symbolises entropy[W], the destructive power within the cosmos, and the Flame symbolises the creative principle and the source of all energy.

A more traditionalist worldview, focused less on the cosmic order and more on everyday practice and worship of elven deities, is found mainly among the tribes living outside Ard Ghel.[3]

Folklore

Elven populace of Ard Ghel and the surrounding tundras ward off boredom with sagas[W] of love and warfare, chronicling internal strife among the Aen Ghele and external conflicts with dragons, giants, and the polar dh'oine. Like all elven tales, these epics are characterized by highly poetic language, layered allegories, and intricate psychological portraits of protagonists and antagonists alike.

The harsh environment gave birth to a distinct narrative tradition centered on themes of isolation and survival, starring wanderers and exiles, lost children, or lone hermits, who voluntarily or by force stand alone against winter's wrath, often in the heart of the polar night.[3]

Notable Aen Ghele

- Glarwyr
- Páll
- Seighwar

Part Aen Ghele

- Narien (half Aen Ghele)
- Shiadhal (one quarter Aen Ghele)
- Kasper Rigel (distant ancestry suspected by Glarwyr)

Notes

- Unlike other elven cultures described on this wiki, Aen Ghele do not appear in Andrzej Sapkowski's original novels at all (the Winter Queen is indeed said to have gathered followers by piercing their hearts with ice, but nothing is said about said followers forming a new culture). The only quasi-official source they are described in are *The Witcher Thursdays* published by the Facebook page of the Polish edition of *The Witcher Role-Playing Game*, which in turn were based upon Mikołaj "SMiki" Skrzyński's fanon idea. **The culture should not be taken as part of CD PROJEKT RED's The Witcher franchise or book continuity unless mentioned elsewhere.**
    - Writing the *Thursday* about the Aen Ghele, SMiki "kinda forgot" to

mention the true purpose of gathering so many elves in the arctic. Only alluded to in the material is the fact that the Glacier Folk colonies were established with purpose to serve as the Aen Elle's breeding stock to recreate Elder Blood and Elder Memory, lost during the Age of Migration – when Shaerram took the pregnant Narien to the world of Aen Elle, he did so not out of love but to finalize a millennia-spanning genetic program; neither are the first Winter Queen's intentions to be taken for granted. One can assume that once the Aen Saevherne lose interest in their brethren "livestock", the Glacier Folk's ambitions of thriving in the frozen world might face an abrupt reality check, unless they too manage to leave with the Swallow.

References

1. ↑ *Blood of Elves*
2. ↑ *Crossroads of Ravens*
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